

Patient & Family Information

SURGICAL SITE INFECTION Hotel Dieu Hospital

Part of the Infection Control service of the Kingston Hospitals

Clean Hands Protect Lives



Clean hands before:

- Using the toilet
- Leaving your room (for inpatients)
- Visiting in hospital
- Eating or touching food

Clean hands after:

- Using the toilet
- Contact with any body fluids like blood, urine or vomit
- Blowing your nose, sneezing, coughing, or using a tissue
- Handling garbage
- Touching any hospital equipment
- Visiting a patient
- Attending therapy or clinic
- Touching an animal or pet
- Removing gloves or gowns

Use Hand Sanitizer:

- When your hands are not visibly soiled
- Apply one to two pumps of product to the palm of one hand
- Rub your hands together; covering all surfaces with product until your hands are dry (this should take at least 15 seconds)

Hand Washing:

- Wet your hands with warm running water and then apply soap
- Lather and rub all surfaces of your hands and wrists for at least 15 seconds
- Rinse thoroughly
- Pat your hands dry with paper towel and then use the paper towel to turn off taps, and open the washroom door
- Apply lotion to hands if they become dry

The most important practice to prevent the spread of germs is good hand hygiene!

WHAT ARE SURGICAL SITE INFECTIONS (SSIs)?

Surgical site infections occur when harmful germs enter your body through the surgical site (any cut the surgeon makes in the skin to perform the operation). Infections happen because germs are everywhere – particularly on your skin. Most infections are caused by germs found on and in your body.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SSIs?

- Increased soreness, pain, or tenderness at the surgical site
- Redness or puffiness near the incision
- Greenish-yellow or bad-smelling discharge from the incision
- Fever or chills
- A tired feeling

Symptoms can appear at any time from hours to weeks after surgery. Implants such as an artificial knee or hip can become infected a year or more after the operation.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR SSIs?

The risk of acquiring a surgical site infection is higher if you:

- Are an older adult
- Have a weakened immune system or other serious health problem such as diabetes
- Smoke
- Are malnourished (don't eat enough healthy foods)
- Are very overweight
- Have a wound that is left open instead of closed with sutures

WHAT WILL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS DO TO PREVENT SSIs?

Health care providers take the following precautions to prevent SSIs:

- Practicing proper hand-washing techniques. Before the operation, the surgeon and all operating room staff clean their hands and arms with an antiseptic.
- Cleaning the site where your incision is made with an antiseptic solution just before the operation
- Wearing medical uniforms (scrub suits), long-sleeved surgical gowns, masks, caps, shoe covers and sterile gloves in the operating room during the surgery
- Covering the patient with a sterile drape during the surgery with an opening where the incision is made
- Closely watching the patient's blood sugar levels after surgery to make sure it stays within a normal range. High blood sugar slows the wound from healing.
- Warming IV fluids, increasing the temperature in the operating room and providing warm-air blankets (if necessary) to ensure a normal body temperature. A lower-than-normal body temperature during or after surgery prevents oxygen from reaching the wound, making it harder for your body to fight infection.
- Clipping, not shaving any hair that has to be removed before the operation. Clipping prevents tiny nicks and cuts through which germs can enter.
- Covering your closed wound with sterile dressing for one or two days. If your wound is open (not stitched closed), packing it with sterile gauze and cover it with sterile dressing.

PREVENTING SURGICAL SITE INFECTIONS: WHAT PATIENTS CAN DO

- Ask lots of questions. Learn what steps the hospital is taking to reduce the danger of infection.
- If your doctor instructs, shower or bathe with antiseptic soap the night before and day of your surgery. Follow the instructions carefully.
- If you smoke, stop or at least cut down. Ask your doctor about ways to quit.
- After your surgery, if permitted to eat, choose healthy foods.
- When you return home, care for your incision as instructed by your health care provider.
- When caring for your incision, ensure hands are washed before and after.

HOW IS SSI TREATED?

- Some infections are treated with antibiotics - the type of medication will depend on the germ causing the infection.
- An infected skin wound may be reopened and cleaned.
- In certain serious infections, another operation may be needed to treat it.

REFERENCE

For more information about the importance of good hand hygiene practices, read about the Clean Hands Protect Lives campaign at www.oha.com.

Thank you for your help and cooperation.

This brochure provides basic general information only and is to be used as a guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment. April 2009